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Office Memorandum • UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

TO : EUR - Mr. Foy D. Kohler

DATE: November 22, 1958

FROM : GER - Martin J. Hillenbrand

SUBJECT: A "Little" or "Garrison" Airlift for Berlin

Recent discussions of the possibility of resorting to air transport in the event we decide to forego the use of surface transport rather than submit to GDR controls have disclosed that there is much misunderstanding of the factual situation with respect to Berlin's communications with the West and of the effect which the implementation of recent Soviet threats would have on these communications. This memorandum is meant to clear up such misunderstanding.

To begin with, it must be emphasized that we are not facing the same situation which we faced during the 1948-49 blockade of Berlin. At that time, the Soviets stopped all surface transport between Berlin and the Western Zones. The withdrawal of the Western occupying forces and the incorporation of Berlin into the Soviet Zone was their immediate objective.

While the Soviets probably still hope to accomplish this objective in the long run, they have since pursued their goals with more caution and patience, piece-by-piece and with a minimum of violence.

At present, the immediate Soviet objective is to force the Western occupying powers to deal with East German rather than Soviet personnel at the highway and railroad checkpoints (and possibly in the Berlin Air Safety Center, but Soviet withdrawal from the Center would not, in itself, create a serious problem) and thus to put us in the position where our access to Berlin is no longer a right which we can demand in our capacity as occupiers and on the basis of quadripartite agreements but is rather a privilege extended to us by the "sovereign" GDR.

Should the Western Powers refuse to deal with East German personnel at the checkpoints, only the travel of Allied personnel and the shipment of supplies for the occupying forces in Berlin will be affected. This transportation is provided by military passenger and freight trains, by military vehicles, and by the privately-owned vehicles of Allied personnel. These facilities provide transport only for the Berlin garrisons, i.e., for about 10,000 persons.

German transportation, i.e., the transportation upon which for the 2.2 million population of the Western Sectors of the city depends, would not be affected by the threatened Soviet withdrawal. This transportation,

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consists of interzonal trains, interzonal waterways traffic, and truck, bus, and automobile traffic on the interzonal highways, is subject to controls quite similar to those in effect on international borders. These controls have for years been exercised by GDR officials rather than by Soviet military personnel.

Thus the "airlift" which we would have to anticipate if the Soviets make good their threat and if we refuse to deal with the GDR is only a small-scale operation to transport Allied personnel plus materiel and supplies which the occupation forces could not procure locally in Berlin or which could not be brought into Berlin by German carriers.

The three Embassies at Bonn have begun hypothetical planning for a "garrison airlift" of this sort. We hope to receive soon their estimate of the amount of air transport which would have to be committed to such an operation.

If Communist harassment of Berlin's communications should eventually go beyond the measures now threatened by the Soviets, for example if flights of civil aircraft were endangered or if German access to the city were impeded, we should have to decide whether or not to implement the already existing planning for a larger-scale airlift to meet the needs of the Berlin population as well as those of the Allied occupying forces. This is not, however, a problem which we have to face at this time.

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